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FREEDOM

Sandra Trice

THE SHARECROPPER

*I was the seed
couched in a crystal bead
a leech clinging to*

*sticky wet skin
mother sucking your
white cellophane veins*

*until I had no strength
or no heart to continue.
Lies, lies*

*talking my needs.
I watched myself grow
in your glittering eyes*

*and heard you laugh
when my back was turned.
The hands on*

*my shoulders turned to lead
pushed me farther
and farther into the earth.*

*I've come to this
groping beneath ground
at home with the weeds.*

Jeanne Cunningham



VAN

"And what did you do then, Van?" Pam looked at the old man's wrinkled face, then gently put her head on his checked flannel shirt. It had a nice smell. It smelled like, well, like Van, and to her, that was everything good.

"What did you do then!??", she repeated in a louder, but still coy tone.

"Well . . .", he said, looking to the sky as if searching for something. "I saw I had to do something and I had to do it quick — so I whipped around and clipped that big one right here." He put his fist against her chin and pressed lightly. She laughed. "And then I saw the other one comin' at me from the side, see? So I picked up a piece a that wood and gave him a whop he'd never forgit. I whopped him so hard — why —" He stopped and pointed to the field across the lane. "Why, see that ole hickory in Lantiga's field over there? I knocked him clear over that!"

"Gosh!" Her eyes widened like saucers. "What did he do then???"

"Well — he hit that ground a runnin' — skeered as a jack-rabbit. And as far's I can tell, he's still runnin'."

"Wow!" She grabbed his thin arm. It felt as sturdy as an oak to her. Then, bouncing on his lap, she started . . . "Tell me another one, tell me another one. Come on," she whined, tugging at his suspenders.

"All right — all right," he smiled. "Now let me see." He deepened the wrinkles in his forehead and thumped his forefinger on the chair, as though in deep thought.

"Tell me about Joe Turner!!"

"Why, you know about Joe Turner!" he said, brushing the hair off her forehead.

"I know — but tell me again. Please?"

"Well — I reckon I can. Let me see now. Joe Turner — Yep, I remember old Joe. He was as bad as they come. Why, he was so mean his own dog wouldn't even stay around him — and when he walked through the woods — all the little animals run and hid, just like there was some kind of cloud followin' him — warnin' them. He wouldn't even listen to what his mama told him to do, and you know that ain't right now, is it?" He raised his brow.

‘No - o - o,’ she whispered.

“Good girl. So anyway — he was in town one day, whoopin’ and hollerin’ and just bein’ an all-round nuisance, and I decided it was high time to set this . . .”

The story was interrupted by an unpleasant, but familiar sound.

“Pam?! Pam!” A rather slender woman with sharp features was running toward them. “Pamela Jacobs, you get down here right this minute!” She ran to the edge of his yard and stopped, as though it were unfit to cross. Then, pointing her finger to the ground beside her, she continued, “Come here right now!”

Pam’s expression quickly changed as the old man gently lifted her to the ground.

“I won’t go!” she cried, stamping her foot.

“Now Pamela . . .” His voice was gentle but firm. “Remember Joe Turner.”

She paused and stared, then turned and walked toward the irritating figure at the edge of the yard.

“And don’t let me catch you over there again.” She grabbed the child’s wrist and started toward the house. “The idea of that old man calling you over there — did he give you anything?” She grabbed Pam’s hands and pulled them open. “Don’t you ever take anything he gives you, you hear?! Now you get on to the house. I’ll take care of you later.” “And you . . .” She turned to Van. “You leave my little girl alone. I’m tired of you filling her head full of lies — teaching her to lie — teaching her to be like you, you worthless old fool . . .”

Van slowly turned his head and focused his eyes straight ahead. He thought about Pam’s sweet face and how pleasant she made his days. And as he stared at the hickory tree in Lantiga’s field, it blurred and became part of the field.



Deborah Carrington

THE PIONEERS

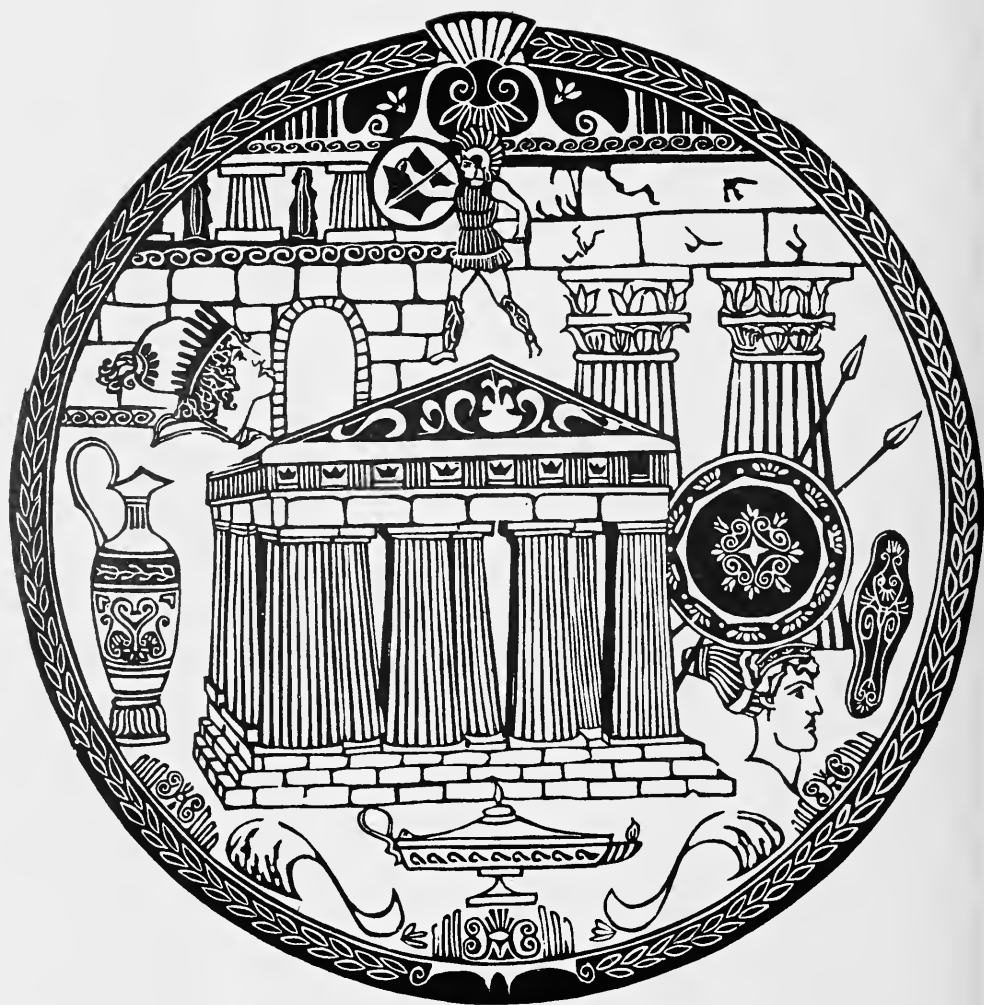
*This land
is one step
from fatal.*

*Only nervous and brutal men
Would come this far anyway
ripping slow miles from savage mountains,
tearing ragged wounds in lush valleys,
shaping them to match their furrowed faces.*

*They can't stay still
Even now when dead they're
staring from glassless gaping windows,
standing in sagging black doorways,
squatting against bare chimneys
on charred and tattered hillsides . . .*

*Ring
stone bells
in churchless
graveyards.*

Brenda Burchett



INTRICATE CLASSIC

Julie Rayner

SKIN

*He's gone.
Time and nothing,
Then like a strutting cock he's back
Pouring me into his mold.
A second skin
Stretching,
It tears.
Shaking fingers enlarge rends
Til falling away in shreds
The wind catches it
Like burnt bits of paper
Scattered and blown.
Wet,
Exposed, shivering
Offering my nakedness
Encroached by no forms
I reach for him.
Fingers, chests, abdomens, and lips meet.
I join his body,
My body.*

Christine Sharpe



KEEPING SCORE

"Honestly, Nan, did you really cheat at Chinese checkers?"

"Why not? I couldn't let my brother beat me. That would have reinforced his smug male ego."

"There you go again."

"Don't change the subject. Didn't *you* ever cheat at games while you were a kid?"

"No, I don't think I did. Maybe at solitaire."

They laughed. Nan slid off the sofa to put a record on. Of course. Jack Armstrong never cheated at games.

"Bill, you're not drinking your tea. I searched for hours for that stuff, all over this jerkwater town."

"I guess I'm not in the mood for green tea."

"If you don't like it come out and say so. Don't hedge." She winced, stifling the impulse to say the inevitable reply along with him.

"O.K. I don't like it."

"I sort of guessed you wouldn't." This time she lost. In unison they chanted,

"But it's the thought that counts."

"All right, you win. I'll put the coffeepot on." She walked into the kitchen, creaking boards with a zest. Humming along with the record, she banged dishes and coffeepot in the sink.

"Bill."

"Yeah." He stretched full length on the sofa and methodically cleaned his ear with his pinky.

"I hate to bring this up again, but . . ."

"NO, Nan, I can't go. You know I have an exam."

"Just thought I'd try." She re-entered the room. "Here's your coffee, straight guy."

"How's the wine doing?"

"Great. The balloon's made real progress since you saw it. It's standing straight up over the top of the jug."

"I still say you put too much yeast in it."

"Bill, I've been making wine for years."

"I don't doubt that. Let's go see how it's doing."

"Oh — let's not."

"Lazy."

"No, I'm not. Anyhow, the wine's at Carolyn's."

"*What* is it doing over *there*?"

"If you really have to know, the balloon burst all over the closet and I

moved it to her basement in case it happened again."

"Diagnosis: too much yeast."

"You and your med school superiority. You know as well as I do that balloon you put over the jug was too small."

"No comment."

"And what's more, the stuff burst all over the new coat I just bought with my hard-earned money and it may never look the same again."

"I'm sorry. But you know I couldn't have kept it in the dorm."

"Why don't you move out of that cloister, anyway?"

"I've detailed my reasons to you before, Miss Independence."

"Essentially the same reasons that you can't go to the party with me Sunday night."

"How do you figure that?"

"Never mind. I don't want to open that can of beans again."

"Seems like there's a whole cupboard of beans sitting around unopened."

"Aren't we witty?"

"Why complain?"

"I'm not. Just surprised." She was actually rather pleased. This game was one she never lost. He'd take her to that party yet.

"Listen, Bill, let's start all over. How do you like the new rug?"

"It's different. Where did you get it?"

"That new import place in the mall."

"Wasn't it expensive?"

"You can't see the forest for the price tags."

Sneak attack. One for her side.

"At least I don't always run out of money a week before payday." Ouch. Even score.

"I support *myself*, at least." This was getting out of hand. Time for the trump card. "And furthermore, I am sick and tired of never being able to discuss anything without getting a moral lecture of some kind. Lecture yourself for a while."

She dashed up the stairs and into the bathroom, locking the door behind her. Let him stew a while. She winced as she heard footsteps solidly, slowly climbing the stairs.

"Nan? Where'd you go so fast?"

She gritted her teeth and waited. The door rattled and she heard a satisfied grunt outside. Should have taken longer.

"Nan, why'd you lock yourself in the bathroom?"

"One *usually* locks the bathroom door when one wants *privacy*."

Silence. She stifled an involuntary giggle. Maybe she should run the shower, just for a laugh.

"I'll be waiting downstairs."

"Don't bother."

"What are you going to do up here all night? Watch your toothbrush drip?"
That hurt. Definitely a point for him.

"Great exit line."

"Is that a hint?"

"Bright boy."

"Nan, just *why* are you so mad at me all of a sudden?"

"It's the kind of person you are."

"O.K. Finish. I know there's more."

"You, William Cary Stanford, are the kind of person who eats bananas on your cereal every morning. You're the kind of person who has a sock drawer to himself, at the very top of the dresser. You're about as ordinary as carry-out chicken. Sorry to say it so harshly, but that's the way I feel."

Silence, then footsteps. There was a long, long pause, then the door slammed. Nan rattled down the bare wooden stairs. Half the fun in life was telling Bill just how dull he was. Someday she'd shake him out of that cubic hole of his. Then would come pay-off time.

She lit a cigarette and glanced around the living room. A piece of paper lay on the coffee table. So that was what he had been doing down here; writing a note. She idly picked it up, noting the prep-school handwriting. If he was really going to be a doctor, he'd have to cultivate illegibility. She read it aloud.

Nan:

You're the type of person who would ride a subway for thirty miles just to prove you weren't a car salesman. You'd wear cowboy boots to church.

William C. Stanford

P.S. Nice knowing you.

P.P.S. Game, set, and match.

THE DARKHOUSE

*I get tired of it.
I decide to do something.
I move to Brittany.
On the cliffs of Quiberon
I build a darkhouse.*

*I fit it with a lamp
so powerful the black
sweep of its beam is visible
morning and afternoon,
all up and down the coast,
far out beyond Belle-Isle.*

*Every day all day I man
the tower, just in case.
If only one is saved
it will be worth it.*

BEARS

*Stuffed bears belong to everyone
Acrylic covered faces change sadness to smirking
Painted plastic surgery changes his role
in the life of his possessor.
His ability to be completely possessed pleases
his owner.*

Christine Sharpe

SUMMER

*The beach ball sun bounces
Down the wet sand
Where seaweed basks.
Horseshoe crabs amble
Into sandcastle dwellings
Fashioned by children who
Forget that playful waves
Never rest.*

Karen L. Foster



ARCHITECT OF THE PAST

Julie Rayner

THE RECKONING

The old man sat stooped on the bench watching. His wife had just filled his belly full of waffles and eggs for supper — he felt good. His hide, weatherbeaten and brown, blended endlessly into the salt-stained wood. The sun was low, almost-gone, but still there good enough to cause streaks of light to ripple across the bit of waves that beat up tirelessly against the pilings. He struck up a match for his cigarette and leaned back half-dozing.

"Mr. Hamblin?" a voice called out.

The old man started. Turning around he saw a young man walking toward him from the driveway. He stood up slowly stumping out his cigarette.

"Mr. Hamblin?" The young man reached out his hand. "I'm Larry Parker. Just talked to your wife a little while ago to see if I could get a couple hundred steamers — I know it's late but she said you usually have some extra this time of year — really hope you can spare me some!"

The young man's grip was firm and friendly. "Sure, sure, glad to meet you — glad to get you some anytime." Mr. Hamblin said. He looked at the young man carefully. Where the deuce have I seen him before, he thought. "Yep, got quite a few these days left over," he said aloud, "seems market's not half as demanding since end of September — seems not many people's even having steams much more like they did. Say, aren't you new around these parts — but seems I've seen your face somewheres but can't quite place it."

Larry Parker smiled. "Well sir, you're about the fifth person who's asked me that question these last few days. I'm not really new — well, maybe I am — my family and I've just moved down from Philadelphia last week. Matter of fact, only about a quarter of a mile from here, down the neck, in my uncle's old house — Tom Parker — you probably remember him. Well, we're in the process of fixing it up and . . ."

Well, I'll be damn!" George broke in. "Here, let me shake your hand again, boy, I know who you are perfect. Hell, know Tom Parker? He damn well taught me near everything I ever learnt in this business here. Me and him was good buddies for years. I knew I'd seen you before — couple years back, right, at the funeral, probably, huh?"

"Yes, sir, you probably did." Larry reached down and threw a piece of rotting squid to a gull. "Probably did. It seemed like everything happened so fast then — we didn't even know he was sick. We couldn't stay long down here — had to get back the next week because my partner had an emergency to come up. But we made the decision to move about two months ago, but, I'll tell you, we had no idea the place was so grown up. My wife, Julie, and I've really had our hands full — it's like starting from scratch again."

I imagine that!" Mr. Hamblin laughed. "Yeah, old Tom, he didn't go in much for modern things. Reckon you all've really had to do a lot of work to the place. Glad to have a part of Tom's family back in town, boy, tell you, weren't nobody like him in this world, that's for sure! Him and me, we got some good hauls those days, prices good. And that old colored fellow used to work with

him, Rukus they called him — him off on Friday nights boozing and a bragging and bringing over them city folks to look. Did a business off'n them people those days right much. And that couple from New York, begged to go out with us one morning just to see. Good oyster season it was — couldn't understand why we called 'em beds and why they had such big ugly shells. And Rukus a laughing and sneaking their whiskey behind their backs. And them getting off and wading and cutting their feet and Rukus laughing. Guess if they was to come back now they wouldn't know the place. But Tom Parker — he sure was a fellow."

"That's what I hear," Larry said. "We sure are glad to be here. I've always loved this place — used to spend summers here when I was a kid. I can remember my uncle taking me out on the boat with him — really some good times. I was just telling Julie about it last night — she couldn't believe some of the stories about him. She likes it a lot here too — she kind of had to get used to the marsh mud smell and the compost, though. We both had a craving for some clams a little while ago — tried to call the seafood plant but it seems they don't sell locally or something."

Mr. Hamblin looked away. He walked over to a boat tied to the dock and untied and retied the knot tighter. "Nope, they won't sell a nick locally I hear," he said turning back to Larry. "They're the big time around here now, I reckon." He sighed and leaned up against a post. "Things 've changed a lot now it seems. Mr. James, man that owns it's, been by a couple times wanting me to sell out and work for him. Seems I'm the last of the three who used to be in business. Tom's gone and Jake Wallace, well, he sold out last year — they've got him behind a desk these days mainly doing nothing, I hear. Nope, can't see me doing it, boy, I'll tell you. Wife says it'd be a blessing what with my bad back now. Nope not me — couldn't hold a ink pen if I tried." He held out gnarled fingers for Larry to see and then stuck them back into his pockets. "Well," he said quickly, "this ain't getting you them clams. Here come on over here and I'll count you out a couple hundred." He started walking toward a paint-chipped red shed.

"Mr. Hamblin!"

He stopped and turned around. Larry walked over to him. "I . . . I don't blame you," Larry said softly. He looked at George closely. "You know sir, it's the people like you I admire and respect the most. It's hard to explain really. This place, this town, the people. I've never know anything like it before. It's like I'm set free down here. The people here — they know how to live. Everyone's so friendly and willing to help — it's like they'd do anything for anybody at anytime. Like tonight — you getting me these clams so late and . . ."

"Aw, it's nothing," Mr. Hamblin said, "glad to do it for you, really glad. Like you said people's willing to help out alot here. But it seems like I said not many's left. Reckon maybe you've caught me at a bad time tonight, boy, don't mean to go on so but alot's happened lately. Tends to get a man down — good to see a young fellow like you," he looked at Larry and put a hand on his shoulder, "you're new — moving down — not out to change things for the buck." He

stared off at the sun sinking low. "You made me think just then kind of. Here, come over here for a minute, almost dark but I want you to see something. You talked just then about setting free. How you feel you're getting set free." They walked over to the corner of the shed and Mr. Hamblin pointed over toward the other side of the channel.

"Look over yonder," he paused for a moment, "you see that old broke down scow wallowing deep in that mud? Old Tom's scow that was — almost see him now — specially mornings like this one was — taught me a lot. You know nobody's ever got up enough nerve to haul it off it seems. Kind of just lays up there sinking proud-like, daring somebody to touch it. The kids around here — they won't even go near it, much as they like to play. Your uncle Tom, he's like a legend round here to folks. But you know, it's like that old scow — that thing sets free. After Tom passed on things changed everywhere. But you know, that Mr. James, he's bought up that side of the channel too — they're bringing in the dredger 'morrow morning early. You know, they're going to get that scow fast — they're gonna expand over yonder. Those folks, Mr. James and his crew, they don't know nothing, boy, nothing. I've watched 'em operate — watched 'em careful — slowing buying up, bringing in the big rigs — making a haul, getting the buck, yep, they were the first. Folks getting used to it now, I reckon, specially since the big auction last year. Wrecking the water here and starting on the land — old McGuiness' farms," he pointed behind him. "Way beyond them trees back there, that new bunch, coming in and tearing up all the . . ."

What do you mean, sir, people are upset over. . ."

". . . got all those bulldozers," Mr. Hamblin went on not hearing him, "coming in and clearing. That auction sure tore this place up — Hell, this ain't getting them clams. . ."

"No, no, please go on," Larry said quickly. "I'd like to hear more about it."

"Not that much to tell really," Mr. Hamblin said. "Come on in and I'll start counting for you." They went in the door. Mr. Hamblin flicked on the light. "How many you say?"

"Uh, two hundred, if you've got that many to spare, sir, we were thinking of asking some people over tonight." Larry walked over and sat down on the edge of the bench watching Mr. Hamblin hose off a bushel.

"Did you know McGuiness well?" he asked.

"Know him, sort of I reckon," Mr. Hamblin answered. "Ain't nobody really knowed him. Had no family to speak of — kept to hisself most the time. Left the farms in some kind of trust when he died — nobody ever got the whole story. Some lawyer up Baltimore set things up, sold flat out to some damn developers last year at sealed bid auction — nobody round here knew nothing. Really fired folks up. Talk of making things tough on that bunch but things cooled off after a time. Just this past week wife and me rode out there and saw 'em bulldozing, tearing hell out of every tree in sight. Completely torn down the house and buildings — surveying and setting up those plastic toilets. Makes my heart sick." He strained to lift the bushel and dumped the clams on the ledge to

count. "Say you mind reaching me one of those sacks behind you, boy?"

Larry handed him a burlap sack and cleared his throat nervously. "Well, I guess things do change, sir, sometimes people don't realize it's for the best at the time but really . . ."

"What you say?" Mr. Hamblin dropped the last clam in the sack.

"I said sometimes people don't realize a change is for the best, and they resent new innovations intended to help th..."

"Huh?" Mr. Hamblin looked up at him and squinted. "Yeah — you sound like Ma talking now, boy." Mr. Hamblin wiped his hands and hiked up his pants. "I reckon I'm just one of those hard headed fools who hates to see the good the Lord give us destroyed. Over there I hear they 'spect folks to buy up lots they call 'em — and build them new modern type houses looks like one big roof." He moved closer to Larry. "And you know what? They're gonna tear up all the shoreline — build up a steel harbor and a big road through the woods. Ha, woods — won't be no woods left time they're done. Top it off I hear they've hired couple of fellows from up north to act as salesmen, I reckon. Front men I call 'em, to get in good with the people here in town. Then they're gonna lure folks down here — give 'em a big show — ride 'em round in fancy cars showing the city slicking folks the sights — taking 'em and getting 'em to meet the nice people of the town — giving 'em free fake china plates and cups for the trip — buying up seafood and giving 'em free to stuff their gut — giving 'em parties, getting 'em drunk and all the time, wanting to sell them lots — wanting that big bill slapped in their grimy fist to stick on their hip and walk away laughing. Somebody want to tell me that's in-o-va-tion?" Mr. Hamblin's eyes screamed. His body shook. "Somebody want to tell me that's good!!" He put his hands to his face and wiped his eyes. "Sorry to talk like that, boy." he said softly. "Here's your clams — treat on me — welcome to the town."

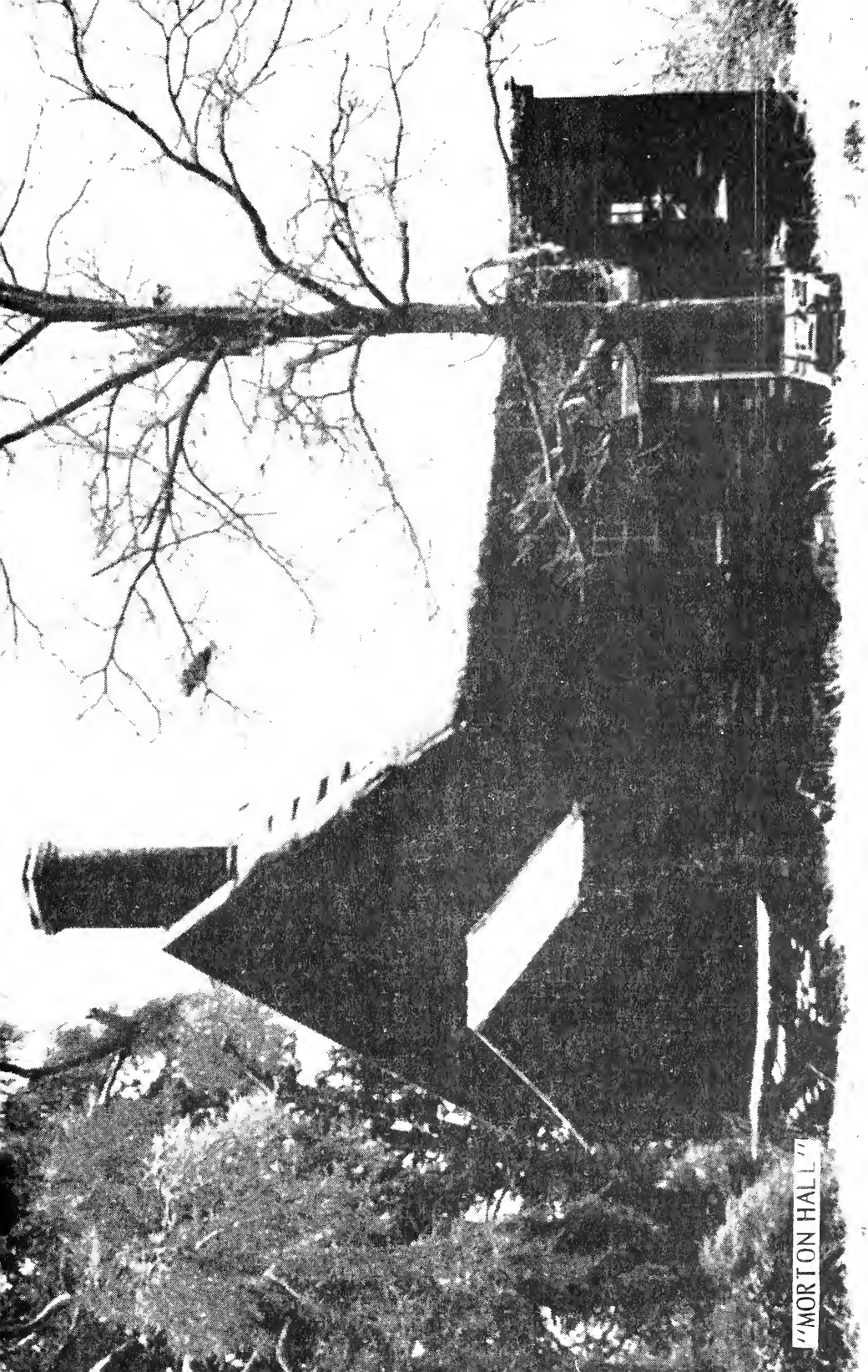
Larry picked up the sack and looked straight in Mr. Hamblin's face. "I ... I can't do that, sir, I want to pay you. I mean you've been kind enough to get them for me and . . ."

"Naw — take them on me. It does my heart good just to know you, boy, good people like you almost makes a man forget the others. Enjoy 'em."

"Sir, I think I should tell you something before I leave because . . ."

"Sure, what's on your mind?" Mr. Hamblin smiled. "I've hardly give you time to open your mouth."

"Well, I, uh, want you to know that I'm not what . . . I mean, I really am what you're talking . . . I mean I really am thankful for these clams." The young man reached out and shook the old man's hand. "I really appreciate this, sir, more than you know. Thank you, sir." He turned around slowly, went out the door, and started up the driveway. Mr. Hamblin walked over to the light to turn it off noticing some small white printed cards scattered on the floor near the door. Reckon Larry dropped them accidental, he thought, picking them up. He glanced over the top of one and read it slowly. He walked over to the door and stared out at the taillights of Larry's car pulling out of the driveway. The new moonlight made the wet spots on the old man's cheek glisten. He thought, maybe I do know, boy, maybe I do.



"MORTON HALL"

THE WIND

*The life you lead is not
the life that follows you*

*it stalks you in the glass
of the dark shops where you stroll
along the boulevards
after the rain has stopped*

it's getting more like you

*it has your body now
it wants your blood*

*is that why sometimes you lie down
on the sidewalk and try
to put your arms around
the pavement*

Quentin Vest

UNTITLED

Gloom exists here. So thick is it that at times it seems even I can't see. The air is still; not one particle is disturbed for there is no one here to breathe its life-giving substance. Darkness settles and as trees bend, the branches are not content to rest unmoved. Concrete slabs stretch for miles but their inscriptions fade unopposed into the nothingness which embodies this place. The moon shies away from those it knows see no light and as clouds form to bury the last semblance of life, my home becomes complete.

There is no time but eternity. For as long as infinity I have watched fearless men struggle one last time in attempts to withstand my approach. With less than a gentle breath, I have melted their shields, powerless before the invisible enemy; and so I enter their souls. Now helpless as infants, they stare at those who come to beat their hearts upon my gates. They cannot perceive that those who once clung to life are content to remain with me. I feel their grief. They are not ready to enter. I cry as they realize they are alone. So I wait.

Marie Wiemer

THE MAN AFRAID OF THE DARK

*The man afraid of the dark
tries lighting a match
but the match turns black in his fingers.*

*Nothing can help
the man afraid of the dark.
What can he do?
Whatever he does only causes the darkness to grow.*

*When he lights a lamp the darkness
hides in the walls and floors
and groans in the plumbing waiting
for the bulb to turn black.*

*The man afraid of the dark
tries setting fire to the house
to drive the darkness away.
The fool! in the morning there it is
for the whole town to see:
everything gone but the darkness.*

*If he looks at the sun
the darkness enters his eyes
spreading in a slow circle.*

*If he looks at the ground
he finds his own darkness
ready to follow him anywhere
(except into the darkness)
like a pet cockroach.
"Get back in my grave!"
cries the man afraid of the dark.*

*Nothing can help
the man afraid of the dark.
But nothing will.*

JAMES SEAY

James Seay, highlighting this year's Literary Festival at Longwood, is an assistant professor of English at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. Born January 1, 1939, in Panola County, Mississippi, he received his B.A. from the University of Virginia. He is married and has two children. Mr. Seay has previously taught at the University of Alabama, Virginia Military Institute, the University of Virginia, and the Hollins College Conference on Creative Writing and Cinema.

Besides publishing two books of poetry, *Let Not Your Hart* and *Water Tables*, James Seay has been published in such periodicals and anthologies as *American Review*, *Best Poems of 1968: Borestone Mountain Poetry Awards 1969*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Georgia Review*, *Hero's Way: Contemporary Poems in the Mythic Tradition*, *Hollins Critic*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Kite-Flying and Other Irrational Acts: Conversations with Twelve Southern Writers*, *The Nation*, *Ohio Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Starting with Poetry*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, and *The Writer's Voice: Conversations with Contemporary Writers*.

Honors he has received include the Emily Clark Balch Prize, The Academy of American Poets Poetry Prize, and the Southern Literary Festival prize. He also was a member of a three-man committee to select a first novel for the 1967 William Faulkner Foundation Award.

Opinions expressed are Those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the GYRE staff, student body, or administration.

Cover design by Deborah Carrington.

